

Labour Department appeals to employers to make flexible arrangements for employees on statutory holiday of Ching Ming Festival to reduce risk of infection

â€‹The Labour Department (LD) today (March 20) appealed to employers to have early discussions with employees on flexible arrangements concerning the statutory holiday of the Ching Ming Festival (April 4) so that their employees may stagger grave-sweeping activities across dates before and after the festival, thereby avoiding overcrowding to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This will help maintain good labour-management relations and protect the health of employees as well as the community.

The LD spokesman said, "The Ching Ming Festival is a statutory holiday. Employers may give prior notice to employees in accordance with the Employment Ordinance (EO) to arrange for employees to take an alternative holiday within 60 days before or after the statutory holiday. Moreover, with the mutual consent of the employer and the employee, any day within 30 days before or after the statutory holiday or alternative holiday may be taken by the employee as a substituted holiday."

For enquiries about the EO, please contact the LD at the 24-hour enquiry hotline on 2717 1771 (provided by 1823) or by email at enquiry@labour.gov.hk. Details of the EO are also available on the LD's homepage (www.labour.gov.hk).

Inter-departmental counter-terrorism exercise simulates bomb attack

The Inter-departmental Counter Terrorism Unit (ICTU) conducted a counter-terrorism exercise today (March 20) at the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point. Codenamed "CATCHMOUNT", the exercise simulated an operation against extremists who plotted a bomb attack at a boundary control point in Hong Kong using improvised explosive devices (IED). Over 250 officers from the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), Fire Services Department (FSD), Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) and Immigration Department (ImmD) took part in the exercise.

Speaking to the media prior to the exercise, Police Senior Superintendent of the ICTU, Mr Chu Man-lung, said there were a number of recent cases involving IEDs. Among which, radio-controlled IED has been placed at crowded location which would result in severe casualties should there be an explosion. Mr Chu further pointed out that the behavior of these violent extremists was very close to terrorist attacks commonly seen in other countries. Members of the public should stay vigilant and beware of an emerging “homegrown terrorism” threat.

The exercise comprised two sessions. The first session was staged at the public transport interchange at the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point. A man detonated a radio-controlled bomb in a rubbish bin, resulting in multiple casualties. The area was then cordoned off for rescue and investigation by officers from the HKPF and FSD who sped to the scene.

Following the bomb detonation, the second scene showcased officers of the C&ED and the ImmD discovered another suspicious object at the departure hall. Evacuation was immediately conducted in an orderly and safe manner. Explosive Ordnance Disposal Bureau officers of the HKPF were called to scene to handle the suspicious object at scene.

Through this exercise, Police aimed to highlight how extreme violence posed serious threat to public safety and to heighten public vigilance and awareness of suspicious objects. The exercise also served to enhance the co-ordination and response capabilities between Police units and other member departments of the ICTU for better protecting the lives and property of the public.

Distribution of masks to front-line cleaning workers of government contractors continues

Having regard to the difficulties encountered by government outsourced cleaning service contractors in procuring masks and to protect the health of front-line cleaning workers and maintain environmental hygiene, the Chief Executive announced on February 8 that the additional 700 000 masks produced by the Correctional Services Department each month would be set aside for distribution to front-line cleaning workers engaged by government outsourced cleaning service contractors to relieve imminent need. The measure will continue for the time being.

Since mid-February, the Government has been allocating these masks following a risk-based approach. These masks have been distributed through the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Housing Department to

the front-line cleaning workers responsible for cleaning streets, public toilets, refuse collection points, public markets and public housing estates, as well as through the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Marine Department and the control points at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and Shenzhen Bay to cleaning workers serving high-risk locations. By mid-March, about 660 000 masks had been distributed to about 21 700 front-line cleaning workers of government contractors.

Upon completion of a review by the departments concerned, it was decided that the relevant measure should continue for the time being, taking into account the current mask supply situation. In conveying the decision to the outsourced cleaning service contractors, the departments concerned have taken the opportunity to remind them that, under the service contracts, contractors have the obligation to provide adequate and appropriate protective equipment to ensure the occupational safety and health of their employees at work, and that they should endeavour to procure masks for their employees.

The relevant departments will continue to closely liaise with the contractors to provide them with appropriate support and assistance.

DH launches video to promote oral health awareness

The Department of Health (DH) today (March 20) launched a newly produced promotional video with the theme "Say Ahh: Unite for Mouth Health" on YouTube to support World Oral Health Day (WOHD) and tie in with the FDI World Dental Federation's global appeal to make a pledge to care for oral health.

The Consultant-in-Charge, Dental Services of the DH, Dr Wiley Lam, called on the public to make a pledge to care for their teeth by adopting good oral care habits to achieve holistic well-being, including keeping the mouth thoroughly clean, having regular dental check-ups, establishing a healthy eating habit and avoiding smoking and alcohol, as well as consuming less sugar.

The Oral Health Education Division (OHED) of the DH has promoted WOHD campaigns to the public during the past few years, stressing that oral health and general health are closely related, and has made the public aware that oral problems, such as dental decay and gum diseases, share many common risk factors with other non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer. These risk factors include poor personal hygiene, smoking and unhealthy eating habits.

The FDI designated March 20 each year as WOHD and called on the dental profession and community groups to hold events on that day for promoting oral

health awareness to the public. This year, the OHED of the DH is carrying out a series of oral health promotion activities to disseminate the related oral health messages to the public, including launching the promotional video in its YouTube channel and promoting the theme "Say Ahh: Unite for Mouth Health" in radio broadcasts, bus stop advertisements and its Facebook page

For more information on oral health, please visit the OHED's Toothclub webpage (www.toothclub.gov.hk), the Facebook fan page of "龔, >ç[®]™ Love Teeth HK" (www.facebook.com/LoveTeethHK/) and the YouTube channel (youtu.be/wgmc9DRy70c).

Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2020 gazetted

The Government published the Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2020 (the Bill) in the Gazette today (March 20).

The Bill aims to amend the Insurance Ordinance (Cap. 41) to provide for a new regulatory regime for the insurance-linked securities (ILS) business and expand the scope of insurable risks of captive insurers set up in Hong Kong. It will implement the policy initiative in the 2018 Policy Address and the 2019-20 Budget Speech.

"The Bill is important for maintaining Hong Kong's competitiveness as an international insurance hub and risk management centre. It will also enable the insurance industry to capitalise on the new business opportunities arising from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development and the Belt and Road Initiative. Our target is to strive for early passage of the Bill so as to boost the financial services industry and the economy at large amidst the challenging times," a spokesman for the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau said.

ILS are risk management tools that allow insurers/reinsurers to raise capital by offloading insured risks to the capital markets through securitisation. Given a rising trend of catastrophic events caused by climate change and urbanisation, the global issuance of ILS has grown substantially in recent years but currently the risk exposure of such ILS is mainly confined to the United States and Europe. It is necessary to make Hong Kong a more conducive domicile for ILS to capture potential business opportunities expected to arise in Asia.

A captive insurer is an insurance company set up by its parent company with the primary purpose of insuring and reinsuring the risks of the companies in the group to which the captive insurer belongs. Captive insurance provides multinationals with the ability to deploy a more holistic

risk management strategy across their international business. With a sound regulatory regime and the availability of a wide range of professionals, Hong Kong is well-positioned to assist multinationals including Mainland enterprises going global to enhance their risk management.

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council for first reading on March 25.